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Are we there yet?-Transport for Tongue Limited (T4T) – a Case Study of a not-for-profit company in North West Sutherland.

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Abstract

This paper explores an under researched area namely the provision of ‘public transport’ in remote and hard to access areas. The case study approach utilises social capital theory to analyse how a social enterprise has been able to provide a much needed service in the Highlands of Scotland in a situation where private sector provision is at best limited and typically non-existent. The paper highlights the issues facing many third sector organisations within rural communities, namely resource acquisition with an emphasis on funding, securing personnel with the right skills set, volunteer burn-out, sustainability and growth. The paper concludes by highlighting an apparent dilemma for the organisation does it scale-up, with all the potential challenges this would imply or does it consolidate?

Key words: social enterprise; social capital; rural transport

Introduction

This case study looks at the development of transport in a remote, rural part of North West Sutherland, where very limited public transport exists. It examines why a company started by volunteers was needed, how the organisation has developed and where the challenges of local authority and Government policy have affected business growth and strategy.

The paper provides evidence for issues raised by Gray et al (2006) who highlight the growing literature in what they term, “unconventional transport initiatives”. The main focus of the Gray paper is to highlight the linking of social capital to these initiatives. This paper by the utilisation of a case study methodology reinforces this connection between an “unconventional transport initiative” and the building of social capital. But unlike the Gray intervention which utilises hypothetical households to highlight the issues of the implications of limited transport infrastructure within rural communities, this paper provides empirical evidence of an attempt to tackle this issue. The paper also provides evidence for policy makers who have noted the importance of transport, for potential employees, for securing the limited employment opportunities

which exist in rural areas (Scottish Government, 2012). Furthermore, transport is also key for accessing educational opportunities within rural areas, particularly at the higher and further educational levels. If these educational opportunities are physically more easily accessible then one aspect of rural depopulation, namely young people leaving rural communities to take advantage of educational opportunities outwith the rural area, may be reduced. This in turn will lead to an increased capacity and help reduce the identifiable 'skills gap' within rural economies (Moyes et al., 2012).

To reinforce these points we utilise the following from the Scottish Government

"Our rural communities will grow in confidence and diversity, taking control of local assets and providing local services to generate income and employment. Our young people will have the opportunity to build careers and prosperous futures in the area where they grew up.....We want to see rural Scotland participating fully in the global exchange of ideas and culture, with the right connections to make this happen, including high speed broadband and **appropriate transport infrastructure.**" <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0044/00443642.pdf> (emphasis added)

So the paper seeks to add to the existing literature of applying social capital to "unconventional transport initiatives" and to provide evidence for policy makers to determine 'what works'.

The methodology employed within this paper involves secondary research but significantly one of the authors is a volunteer with Transport for Tongue (T4T), the social enterprise which comprises the case study. Thus in the words of Bosworth (2012), one of the researchers is part of the "researched". In line with Bosworth we would suggest that this case study similarly presents evidence from a "complete participant perspective" (Robson, 2002, p.316 cited in Bosworth, 2012) and that the experience of being closely involved with T4T has influenced the perceptions of the organisation leading to..."the potential to benefit wider research into cultures of rurality" (Heley, 2011 p.231). With the reflections of two experienced academics and the utilisation of Scottish Government documents on the organisation, it is believed that the benefits of utilising the experiences of a researcher who is also a volunteer in terms of gaining new insights into an under-researched area compensates any issues of objectivity which may arise.

The paper is organised in the following way. The next section is a literature review followed by the case study which consists of an explanation of the establishment and development of T4T focussing on key issues, namely the utilisation and development of social capital, management of community development, finance and volunteering. The paper then concludes by analysing the key issues faced by the organisation and how the study adds to existing knowledge.

Literature Review

Whilst there has been an explosion in the utilisation of the concept of social capital to explain all types of differing organisations, from the relative success of whole national economies (Fukuyama 1995)) to the abilities of small medium enterprises to compete successfully in both urban and rural economies, Gray et al. highlight a deficiency in the application of the concept in relation to supporting community transport initiatives.... “variations in social networks have the potential to impact upon the feasibility of community transport, and in turn to influence the degree to which rural non-car owners can participate in society.” (Gray et al 2006 p.90). Social networks are being recognised as a key component of social capital ... “generally defined as the information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inhering in one’s social networks” (Woolcock, 1998 p.153). Woolcock (p168) further distinguishes between four types of social capital namely:

- Norms (e.g., ‘bonds’ or intra-community ties).
- Networks (e.g., ‘binding’ or extra-community ties).
- Links (e.g., ‘diversity’ or the difference between communities).
- Holders (e.g., ‘bridge-builder’ or change agents).

These four types of social capital entail geographical specificity in their relationship to particular places and scales, that is, their context (Portes,1998; Woolcock, 1998). For example, norms can be seen as both a broad-scale phenomena covering the whole Third Sector, (e.g. ,mutualism, voluntarism, etc.), as well as specific to the Third Sector in distinct places (e.g., local communities). This is particularly appropriate given that T4T is a Third Sector Organisation within a specific geographical location. Networks can also be conceptualised in these terms in that they connect different sectors (e.g., private, state, and third) as well as different institutions, organisations, and people in and across distinct places and scales. In similar terms, the differences (i.e., diversity) between such social actors can cut across scales, whilst the position of such actors (i.e., holders) is also constituted by place and scale.

It will be observed below that the operationalization of T4T has developed through the relationship between these three sectors and has utilised bonding and bridging social capital which have been dependent on holders, that is, bridge-builders. This touches on a crucial aspect of social capital, namely the necessary link between social and material resources, which is highlighted in both the established literature (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Evans and Syrett, 2007) and in this case study. It is particularly important that the pursuit of social objectives such as democratic participation, voluntarism, and mutualism through economic activity does not lead to profit ‘leakage’ – i.e., leaving an organisation (Lindsay and Hems, 2004, p276) – and, consequently, that the means (i.e., economic activity) are considered to be as important as the ends (i.e., social objective) (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004).

An issue that has arisen within the literature on social capital is the potential problem of embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985), this could be a feature of rural communities where resources are scarce and thin on the ground (Evans and Syrett, 2007). Thus, there are concerns that the development of only one form of social capital (i.e. bonding) can inhibit change, in that the promotion of strong bonds detracts from developing new relationships, whilst also limiting access to resources for individuals who are peripheral group members (Mair and Marti, 2006). Within rural communities the bonding social capital linked to other specific local communities within the same area, that is through bonding social capital, should both limit the chances of embeddedness and also result in the growth of social capital leading to greater capacity within the area overall.

Background to the Case Study

There was very limited public transport in the parish of Tongue,¹ nothing to link the remote and rural communities of Melness, Tongue & Skerry, with their near neighbours in Durness (40 miles) Strathnaver (15 miles) Bettyhill (12 miles) or the nearest towns Thurso (43 miles) and Lairg (40 miles). The city of Inverness is 100 miles to the south and when T4T began in 2009, it was not possible to go to Inverness and return on the same day unless you had a private car. The Post Bus² to Lairg had previously been the only public service available, but changes to the timing of Route 134 meant there was no connectivity with the train, passengers still had to walk 1.8 miles south to the railway station from Lairg village.

Community surveys had identified transport as a major problem, especially for 25.6% of the population in the parish, identified in the Information Services Division site, part of the NHS Scotland, as being over the age of 65 (Gutierrez, 2013). Many had no access to a car or, due to health or mobility problems, had given up driving altogether. In 2009 a local health care professional wrote a report for the EU Northern Peripheries programme - *Older People for Older People (O4O)*, which highlighted the need for transport to take locals to doctors' appointments in Tongue and dental appointments in Lairg, as well as accessing local shops and the bank and keeping in contact with family and friends. There was considerable support from other community groups and Community Voluntary Services North (CVS) and the Local Development Officer assisted with applications for funding and banking. Responding to the O4O project, financial support was received from Highland Council and

¹ Tongue is a coastal parish, which lies in Highland Council Area, some 29 miles (47 km) north of Lairg and 35 miles (56 km) west of Thurso in Highland. It is located in the old county of Sutherland, which disappeared following the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1974. The parish has an area of 340.1 sq. km (131.3 sq. miles). Tongue has Durness and Farr as its neighbouring parishes - See more at: <http://www.scottish-places.info/parishes/parfirst112.html#sthash.oHWldshs.dpuf>

² Post buses are a common feature in many countries across Europe, particularly servicing rural communities. In the UK they are operated by the Post Office primarily to deliver mail but the mail vehicles have been adapted to also carry fare paying passengers. In the UK they operate a 'request stop policy', that is potential passengers can request a post bus to stop anywhere on its route, providing it is safe and they have space to carry more passengers.

Transport for Tongue was able to purchase the “Red Car” which had wheelchair access.

Transport for Tongue (T4T) was formed by a group of retired locals. A nurse, a banker and a teacher were at the centre of the operation and volunteers were recruited for driving and the administration of a door-to-door (D2D) service which started in June 2009.

A developing enterprise

T4T developed over three years from a part time voluntary group providing transport on demand into a service which required considerable expertise and governance. After seeking professional advice, in February 2012 T4T became a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. A Board of Directors was established, supported by an Executive Committee and an Advisory Board.

The services which were offered to the local community were the original D2D, Section 19 permits and Section 22 registered bus routes.

D2D requires membership of £5 per year and the passenger pays 60p per mile for each pre-booked return journey from their home to their destination. If a car is required for medical appointment outwith the local area, a set fee is charged. Volunteer drivers use their own cars and are reimbursed 45p per mile from their home and back again, or if required the “Red Car” can be used.

Section ³19 permits are granted to not-for-profit organisations who operate in a geographically defined area for local community groups whose transport needs are not being met by any other service. Membership is mandatory and it is not available to the public, Concessionary Bus Passes⁴ cannot be used. A set fee is charged for these journeys. This is an on-demand service.

Under Section 19, a minibus can also be used by local community groups, students and staff from local schools as a Vehicle Hire service. An older minibus was gifted by a charity in Nairn and was used for groups who wanted to travel together.

Section 22 (see footnote 3 below) Registered Bus Routes are agreed with the Traffic Commissioners and must run in accordance with the permissions granted. The aim is to provide a bus service for the community without a view to a profit. The general public can use these routes and Concessionary Bus Passes are accepted.

Community developments

³ Organisations that provide transport on a ‘not-for-profit’ basis can apply for permits under Section 19 or Section 22 of the Transport Act 1985. These permits allow the holder to operate transport services for hire or reward without the need for a full public service vehicle (PSV) operator’s licence.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-19-and-22-permits-not-for-profit-passenger-transport/section-19-and-22-permits-not-for-profit-passenger-transport>

⁴ People living in Scotland who are aged over 60 qualify for free bus travel throughout Scotland. Concessionary Passes may also be available for people with disabilities.

Highland Council (HC) were the transport providers for the Day Car provision at the Kyle Centre in Tongue, a 'well-being hub' which served the parish and other remote crofting townships. In 2012, the Local Authority Day Care Service⁵ was withdrawn including the transport to it. This centre provided day care and a lunch club for some of the most vulnerable residents in the remote communities in North Sutherland. The people using this service were able to stay in touch with friends and family, and in doing so were able to remain a part of this fragile community. Imminent closure was threatened.

A local charity, North Coast Connection (NCC) was established to take over the running of the Kyle Centre and T4T was given a three year contract to provide transport.

Using the Section 22 Operators Licence meant that concessionary bus passes were accepted, so that people from Tongue, Durness, Skerry, Strathnaver and Melness could travel to the Kyle Centre free of charge.

This bus service can also be used by the general public and locals and tourists are encouraged to book a seat. In addition to the Section 22 service to the Kyle Centre there is a weekly return journey to Lairg station on Wednesdays which meets trains going south and coming north and on the last Saturday of the month a bus makes a return trip to Inverness.

As part of the health and wellbeing initiative, a bus goes to the North Coast Leisure Centre (NCLC) in Bettyhill each week. This partnership with NCLC means that T4T members can swim and have access to the spa and gym for a reduced fee. It began as a trial for six months and has proved so popular that it has continued to run. Most users are over 60, with one regular swimmer who is 94.

Operations Management

An Operations Management team was established. The Operations Manager (OM), one of the original volunteer drivers, is a qualified driving instructor and he is also a Driver Awareness Trainer – qualified to offer the Certified Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDA⁶S). This enabled him to train T4T drivers to MiDAS standards and they are then ready to drive minibuses on the Section 22 routes. A deputy OM was appointed, to carry out driving duties as well as taking bookings, keeping a record of all drivers, their hours and wages, banking and bookkeeping. There are many regulations governing transport and T4T has to follow all the rules even though it is a very small third sector company. The administration includes scheduling the routes

⁵ Many Local Authorities in Scotland and the UK provide day care services for the elderly and people with disabilities. The range of services offered vary from Local Authority to Local Authority. The day care centre described here provided a lunch club which was a meeting place for often isolated people to meet for an often subsidised lunch as a way of overcoming isolation and reducing problems than can develop through living in isolation.

⁶ MIDAS is a UK recognised scheme for the assessment and training of minibus drivers

and the drivers, making sure the busses run at times which suit the community and join up with other transport systems, particularly train times. Bus safety checks are carried out every day by the driver and, every 8 weeks, each bus has to go to a garage to have a safety examination by a qualified mechanic. All maintenance, cleaning and valeting is organised by the OM and he is also responsible for recording all bus trips, mileage, passengers, fare-paying and concessionary bus pass holders and the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG). He has a pool of nine MiDAS trained drivers who work on zero hours contracts.⁷ This type of contract is preferred by the drivers, as most of them have retired, have other part time jobs or are crofters with livestock.

Finance and Challenges of growing the business

The level of financial and business support that T4T has received from Highland Council (HC), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ) has been considerable. At an early stage, HC was able to fund the purchases of the first car, give a development grant of £5000 and a transport grant was also agreed. The transport grant covered running costs but the financial situation became difficult when only 56% of the expected sum arrived. It was all in the small print, but had not been fully understood by the new entrepreneurs, and other community organisations were in a similar position. Highland Council agreed to change their funding criteria and offered an extra tranche of money to allow T4T time to seek additional income. CVS North intervened with the contractors who were carrying out road maintenance on the causeway and they agreed to hire T4T to provide transport on the 12 mile, single track detour around the Kyle of Tongue when the causeway was closed for repair. This kept the new venture solvent, but very aware that new sources of funding had to be accessed to supplement the income streams of transport grant, membership fees and passenger fares.

Section 22 registered routes offered the best solution. A suitable vehicle had to be purchased and a successful application to the Village SOS Big Lottery fund⁸ and the Caithness and North Sutherland Fund gave T4T the opportunity to order a custom-made minibus which arrived in October 2012

⁷ A zero hours contract is generally understood to be a contract between an employer and a worker where:

- the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum working hours, and
- the worker is not obliged to accept any work offered. www.acas.org.uk

⁸ The Big Lottery Fund is supporting rural communities across the UK through a £1.4 million investment delivered by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) and partners. Projects, potential projects and organisations that provide a service to their local rural community with a population of fewer than 10,000 are eligible to apply. <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/villagesos>

As demand increased, a second 17 seat nearly new bus was purchased in July 2013. This was used as a back-up when required and hired out to local community groups when not in service.

There are dangers that volunteers will burn out as the business grows. The most difficult task is accessing funding from organisations who give to charities and not-for-profit organisations. Many volunteer hours are spent filling in forms, doing three year cash flows, estimating the business growth if the funding is granted. If you have the skills in the organisation to secure grant funding, spending it on exactly what you said it was for, producing estimates and receipts and writing progress reports to meet a pre-set time scale is very demanding on a volunteer finance team. Highland Council require a quarterly report with confirmation of how their grant is being spent and there is a six monthly system to cover all statistical information in the community transport report, as well as the monitoring of objectives and targets.

It can be difficult to find an organisation which is willing to consider a request for funding, but T4T were successful in 2014 to be awarded two grants from Foundation Scotland with their Enterprise Ready Fund (ERF). The first was £25,000 for a replacement of the Nairn minibus, which was old and leaky. A new 9 seat MPV Eurobus was purchased and put into service in March 2014. A second grant of £32,210 was secured to employ a business development officer and refurbish our newly acquired depot.

In 2013 Highland Council (HC) had decided to sell the former council Road Depot in the village of Tongue. It had been unused for 14 years and despite many attempts to buy or lease it from HC, all T4T's requests were refused. When it was advertised for sale, T4T was prepared to put in an offer but there were many local people who wanted the building. The Board of Directors, who had asked on many occasions if T4T could buy the depot, went to the local councillor, to Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HEI), to Highland Council (HC) and in the end the Board of Directors convinced them that an asset transfer to a community business would be the best outcome. A successful funding application resulted in a grant from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) towards legal expenses for the Asset Transfer..

Growing a business in a parish with a population of 526 needs particular marketing skills. To increase our profile locally a business development officer was employed for nine months for 16 hours per week. Also a graduate intern post for 20 weeks was funded through 'Adopt an Intern'⁹ and a local graduate filled this post. Both employees began work in July 2014 at the new offices in the Bank House in Tongue. These were given on a licence-to-occupy by the Royal Bank of Scotland, in the former Bank Manager's house, as their contribution to the community. T4T has developed a web site (www.transportfortongue.co.uk) and Facebook page, all the vehicles have the T4T logo and graphics, designed by a local artist. The Operations

⁹ The 'Adopt an Intern' Program is supported by the Scottish Government and is intended to find employment opportunities for unemployed graduates

Team, when asked, supply vehicles and drivers to the community for local events, free of charge, to heighten awareness of our services and to attract new volunteer drivers to add to the pool of 9 minibus part time drivers and 12 volunteer drivers.

Support from Highland Council

By 2012, T4T was growing, passenger numbers and memberships were increasing and the assurance of a contract for three years from North Coast Connection, a local charity, NCC helped to put the organisation on a more secure financial footing. Highland Council agreed to continue to give financial support through the transport grant, on an annual basis, and in addition made funds available to T4T for business support through Just Enterprise and HISEZ¹⁰. These meetings were important for the development of a management structure which fitted the ethos of the company, “to do good in the community but not harm any existing businesses”. T4T is a small company which has had to respond to the demands for the service, demands which put considerable pressure on a small team and heavy reliance on volunteer time.

The sessions with business advisers were essential to establish a clear vision for T4T and clear lines of authority. Discussion revealed that there were some volunteers who were more focused on its social mission and others on ensuring the business made money in order to be sustainable. Changes were made and succession planning put in place which meant that some volunteers who had been with T4T from the start were able to step down and hand over responsibility to newer members. A business plan was written, giving the Board and the Advisory Group a clearer idea of where the business could develop, and a template produced to use when applying for grant funding in the future.

Volunteering issues

Most of the volunteers in the villages of Tongue, Melness and Skerray are retired people who give their time to drive, manage and support T4T. They join with a variety of skills, but all who drive are put through a two day Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) and Passenger Assistant Training Scheme which is a part of MiDAS .All are trained First Aiders and some have completed a Safeguarding Course. Skills in dealing with vulnerable adults who have mobility problems are taught and all courses are kept up date. All drivers have a disclosure certificate and if driving school pupils and young adults they require a PVG ¹¹

An issue which affects T4T and other voluntary organisations, where there is a reliance on retired drivers, is the D1 ¹²question. If you passed your driving test before

¹⁰ HISEZ Highland and Islands Social Enterprise Zone offers support to community groups across the Highlands and Islands Region who wish to undertake community planning, such as building capacity, business start-up, evaluation etcetera

¹¹ Protection of Vulnerable Groups This is a certificate which allows people to work with groups which are thought to be vulnerable it is part of a national disclosure scheme.

¹² A D1 driving licence gives a driver the entitlement to drive a minibus

1997 you will have a D1 on your licence. This allows you to drive a minibus. When you reach the age of 70, this is taken off your licence by the DVLA¹³, unless you tell them in advance that you require it to stay and if you are providing a service on a voluntary basis. If you passed your driving test after 1997, you will be required to sit a second test. In Scotland this is difficult because of the shortage of examiners qualified to carry out D1 training and testing. If you are over 70 and the D1 has been taken off your licence, you can have it put back on by passing a medical examination, passing a theory test, passing a hazard test and, after 2/3 days training, passing a driving test. All of this is paid for by the candidate and costs around £500. The Community Transport Association is lobbying Westminster parliament for D1 training to be carried out by registered MiDAS trainers in the community. This is seen as cheaper, flexible and attractive to volunteers. It might also generate an income stream for companies like T4T.

T4T is in a position to offer MiDAS training to other community groups and this is an income stream which the OM is very keen to expand, following a successful course with six trainees from outwith the community and nine of T4T's own volunteer drivers. Having a qualified D1 trainer would be a good fit for the organisation.

Support for Community Transport

State Aid is grant funding given to community transport to support a system which is not commercially viable, but is located in an area where no other suitable transport exists. It is seen by some, like T4T, as a lifeline, but in some areas commercial transport companies object to the money being paid to community groups because they can also bid for contracts, for example providing transport for school children. At present Highland Council is actively seeking a reduction of 15% in their transport budget and in some areas community transport groups are being encouraged to enter this forum. Highland Council are attempting to combine routes in order to reduce costs, with the lowest price compliant bid being the most likely criterion, with contracts lasting six years. T4T is located in an area where a national company has the school transport contract at present. A bid for this contract is being considered but the timing of the request to tender is a year earlier than had been expected and would change the status of the company and its operation. It would, however, reduce the need to apply several times each year for funding to keep our unsustainable but socially important routes running.

T4T has successfully managed its finances and has ended each year with a small surplus (Appendix 3). This surplus had been used to subsidise the pilot route to NCLC, and the new developments of transport to North Highland College in Thurso for college students and evening runs to Lairg to connect with the rail services to and from Inverness. With three busses and a car, T4T serves the community well, meeting all current demands (Transport for Tongue Annual report 2014).

¹³ The DVLA is the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency operated by the United Kingdom Government which maintains a register of drivers and vehicles within the UK

New developments

A survey of local households was undertaken and the route most people wanted added was a bus to Lairg which connected with the train arrivals, especially in the evenings. Funding was given by Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Ward Discretionary Fund for a trial period of three months, with a further six months as an on-demand service on Monday mornings, Wednesday evenings and Friday evenings. A bus was at Lairg station to meet train arrivals. This was operated under a Section 22 Licence, a public service allowing concessionary bus passes to be used by those who qualified. After the initial three months, and three months on-demand, the trial was stopped, due to a lack of passengers. Drivers are paid £8.50 per hour, driving time only, and £10 per hour when returning from Lairg station at 21.00hrs. This was not considered a wise use of funds and T4T successfully requested permission to stop the trial until the tourist season began again. Permission has again been received from Highland Council and the Traffic Commissioners¹⁴ to restart this route with an alteration. The extra evening runs, Wednesday and Friday were started again in the Summer months. T4T cannot access any additional funding for this route, but have received a small balance from HIE from their original contribution. T4T will operate this service in conjunction with the published train timetable from service provider Abellio.¹⁵

Another route that T4T has added is a daily return journey from Melness to Thurso. This runs in college term time to take local students to the North Highland College. Previously it was not possible for a student to attend FE college and remain living in the family home in Melness, Tongue or Skerray because there was no public transport matching the college day. The only public bus which left from Bettyhill, twelve miles east of Melness, arrived one hour before college began and left mid-afternoon before classes finished, the journey ending in Bettyhill. This disadvantaged the young students who wanted to continue in education and also impacted on adults who wished to take-up or continue further education. Pupils in the local secondary school who wish to study courses which their school cannot offer, for example IT after S2, were also unable to access alternative classes due to poor travel provision. The funding for this route is presently subsidised by the Caithness and North Sutherland Fund and applications are being made to access a new funding source for the next academic year. Full cost recovery from the students is not possible nor desirable.

Linking transport with Social Care

The contract with North Coast Connection (NCC) to take their elderly clients to the well-being hub is an important one. It allows T4T to contribute to health and social care integration. Improving the accessibility and social inclusion is part of the

¹⁴ Traffic Commissioners are responsible for the licensing and regulation of those who operate heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches and the registration of local bus services

¹⁵ Abellio now operates the rail franchise in Scotland

government's plan to reshape the care of older people. There is interaction with the driver when getting on the bus, seeing friends, having lunch together, maybe doing some exercises or getting information from staff about forthcoming local events, generally allowing older people to remain in and contribute to the community where they live. A T4T intern was on one journey and said *"They were so happy as they were helped onto the bus by the escort, smiling, laughing with the driver, greeting friends. You could see how important it was to them"*.

Around 90% of the older people who attend NCC live on their own, therefore the benefits of having a regular weekly outing are seen to make a huge difference to those with disabilities or mobility problems who are not able to get out without this level of support. On their return journey from the lunch club, after a stop at the local shop, all who need help are escorted, with their shopping, to their front door. In some cases, for those who live with or close to family, this is considered a respite service for the carers and is greatly valued (Report to Scottish Parliament on community transport, 2013).

A 97 year old lady , Georgina of Achininver, who lives on a remote croft, provides a typical comment: *"T4T does really well. I like the driver who comes to pick me up for the Kyle Centre, I look forward to it. He comes every two weeks to take me to the chiropodist too, he's such a nice young man"*.

A further endorsement is provided by a local GP: *"Small community transport organisations such as T4T are working towards a number of Scotland's National Outcomes: they are addressing inequality, improving community sustainability and helping build a stronger, more resilient community. Many studies have demonstrated that regular social contact helps older people to stay healthy and preserves their cognitive function. A vital service T4T provides is for those who need access to the health Centre in Tongue, without this the alternative for many would be to move away, nearer larger centres of population in order to access the services they require"*.

Consolidate or expand?

Since T4T became a limited company it has grown from one car and a second hand minibus to a fleet of 4 vehicles – two minibuses, one 9-seater MPV and a 5-seater car. It runs D2D services, 5 registered Section 22 bus routes and 2 section 19 routes to NCLC and North Highland College, Thurso. A depot for garaging vehicles and a booking office in the centre of Tongue gives a local identity to the business. There is a strong team of volunteers. They make up the finance team, specialist support dealing with publicity, a computer specialist making a data base, IT and website support and design and a graphic designer to keep all our marketing materials fresh. A graduate intern from Edinburgh Napier University completed a report for T4T into community transport potential in NW Sutherland. A second intern completed a Social Return on Investment study which was used to inform a funding body of the benefits

to young people having transport to access Further Education. Close ties have been established with other stakeholders in the community. Our local doctor is a tireless seeker of funding to keep T4T solvent and her patients with D2D transport, a retired health care professional has close ties with Highland Council through the local councillor and HC Technical Services Department, T4T uses the local branch of RBS, petrol and diesel are purchased from the local store. T4T has created six part time jobs and many volunteering opportunities and has developed a business model which has been much admired. The Chief Executive of Highland Council came to visit Tongue to see for himself the depot and offices and ask how he could help a community group who were successful and adding value to the parish. The Chairperson asked that T4T receive funding for three years instead of the usual one. He agreed and in return asked T4T to become a case study for Highland Council and to make a DVD of its operation to be used as an exemplar to other small community groups who may want to start a community business with volunteers. Awards and recognition have been received by one of the original founders, *Scotland's Real Heroes* on STV, T4T appeared on the BBC Lottery show as a community group who had made a difference in their community because of the award it had received in 2012. A second intern was a finalist in the Intern of the Year awards in April 2015 and T4T has featured in two films, one at the EU in Brussels with O4O and the other in Japan with HISEZ.

Highland Council supports T4T with a grant and has been actively seeking public opinion on all the rural transport schemes it supports. The reduction in budget available to run school transport and door-to-door or dial-a-bus¹⁶ services is being cut by 15%. In some remote areas, the best value for money for HC is by the community transport services it supports. It is to these services that HC is looking to bid for routes which have previously been operated by commercial transport companies. T4T has this opportunity but it will change the status of the company, from not-for-profit, with community at its heart, to one requiring VAT registration and financial management and the appointment of a salaried financial director, a change not all volunteers and staff are 100% in favour of.

Discussion and Conclusion

All of this success has been achieved by a small team who volunteer around 400 hours per month. All paid staff also work volunteer hours in addition to their contractual duties. This small company only exists because of the dedication of the employees and the contribution of the volunteers. To develop the business as a more sustainable organisation will require a commercial contract because the number of passengers required to make it a viable company is more than the population can supply. Tourists have not made up substantial passenger numbers and the cost of a marketing campaign is beyond the reach of the financial position

¹⁶ Dial-a-bus services are operated in many regions within the UK. The service provides a door to destination service, and is accessed via phoning the operating authority. The service is primarily used by elderly and disabled people.

present. The ethos of the community members who came together in 2009 was to provide transport for local people who were without the means to access vital services and medical appointments. The routes which have developed since 2012 continue to run only while grant funding can be accessed. The decision to grow and compete in a tendering auction for school transport is one which will have to be addressed in the very near future. The alternative strategy would be to consolidate the routes where there is currently a demand and grow those services to include other rural and remote communities along the way.

This case study highlights the role of the different elements of social capital. The initial idea arose within the community with volunteers coming together to identify what was required to establish T4T. From this initial group, which we can identify as bonding social capital as the majority being retired and new to the area, was the realisation that they would require further resources to establish and develop the enterprise. This required working with several state agencies, local authorities, National Health Services, Highland and Island Enterprise, for example, which provides evidence of bridging social capital. The links with the private sector, notably the Royal Bank of Scotland, further highlights this development of bridging social capital. Furthermore, the case study evidences the role of key individuals in this capital accumulation, providing the key links between the different sectors.

What is also in evidence is the fluid nature of social capital with some original volunteers stepping aside when they felt the original motivation for the enterprise was being diluted in favour of more commercial considerations. This may lead to something of a watershed with the current debate of whether to bid for local authority contracts. This may have further repercussions in that, if they were to enter the bidding process, the scaling up of operations could lead to a loss of support within the local community and 'sour relations' with elements of the private sector. Likewise it may broaden and deepen social capital if T4T was able to provide greater employment opportunities, enhance the range of service provision and continue to build the transport infrastructure within the community.

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